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ABSTRACT

Surveys in Portland, Oregon, and San Francisco, California, asked 448 employers about their exposure and reactions to job development activity by agencies serving disabled and disadvantaged persons. Respondents were generally favorable or indifferent to being contacted, rated the performance of their disabled employees as being average or above average in comparison to other workers, and said that state rehabilitation agency clients tended to be as qualified as other applicants. Almost all indicated that they would hire a disabled person who was more qualified than other applicants and a third indicated they would give preference to a disabled person who was as qualified as other applicants. Self-reported hiring of disabled persons and hiring of state agency clients increased with the number of employees and with the number of positions filled. Firms which reported being contacted by an agency representing disabled persons were more likely to report hiring a disabled person than firms which did not report being contacted. The percentage of firms hiring at least one and of firms hiring more than one disabled person increased with the number of times a firm was contacted. Expressions of willingness to hire disabled persons were not related to self-reported hiring or to hiring of state agency clients. Larger firms were more likely to hire disabled workers than smaller firms, and it was recommended that job developers continue to concentrate their efforts on larger firms, while keeping abreast of employment trends and employers' needs. (Author/KC)

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# EMPLOYER REACTIONS TO EFFORTS TO PLACE DISABLED AND DISADVANTAGED WORKERS

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Studies in Placement Monograph No. 4

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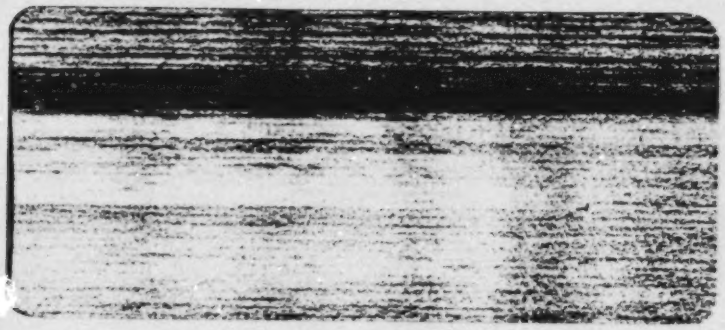

The Regional Rehabilitation Research Institute (RRRI) at Portland State University is an organization devoted to applied research in vocational rehabilitation. The Institute was established in 1974 with a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and is currently funded by the National Institute of Handicapped Research. The RRRI is a regional organization serving the needs of rehabilitation agencies in DHEW Regions IX and X which include Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska, California, Nevada, Arizona and Hawaii.

From its inception, the RRRI has focused on the issue of job placement for handicapped individuals. While it does not provide direct placement services, the Institute does support and improve placement services provided by state rehabilitation agencies. The Institute's emphasis on applied research stems from its close relationship with an Advisory Board consisting of representatives from private industry and state vocational rehabilitation agencies. Because of diverse activities in research, training and consultation, the RRRI has acquired a national reputation in the area of job placement for the handicapped.

Surveys in Portland and San Francisco asked 448 employers about their exposure and reactions to job development activity by agencies serving disabled and disadvantaged persons. Respondents were generally favorable or indifferent to being contacted, rated the performance of their disabled employees as being average or above average in comparison to other workers, and said that state rehabilitation agency clients tended to be as qualified as other applicants. Almost all indicated that they would hire a disabled person who was more qualified than other applicants and a third indicated they would give preference to a disabled person who was as qualified as other applicants. Self-reported hiring of disabled persons and hiring of state agency clients increased with the number of employees and with the number of positions filled. Firms which reported being contacted by an agency representing disabled persons were more likely to report hiring a disabled person than firms which did not report being contacted. The percentage of firms hiring at least one and of firms hiring more than one disabled person increased with the number of times a firm was contacted. Expressions of willingness to hire disabled persons were not related to self-reported hiring or to hiring of state agency clients.

## EMPLOYER REACTIONS TO EFFORTS TO PLACE DISABLED AND DISADVANTAGED WORKERS

State vocational rehabilitation agencies make considerable investments in job development without knowing whether such activity yields commensurate gains in the number of clients placed or where the agency's efforts do the most good. Contacting some employers undoubtedly increases their readiness to hire a client. However, many employers need no encouragement and others can be put off if an agency representative is unfamiliar with a company's business, makes inappropriate referrals, or presses for jobs which do not exist. Indeed, as more organizations serving disadvantaged and disabled persons have taken steps to capitalize on affirmative action requirements, there has been growing concern that some employers are being approached so frequently that their patience is wearing thin.

Job development assumes that contacting employers can change their attitudes and that positive attitudes translate into jobs. That can be the case only when an employer has the latitude to respond favorably in terms of having suitable openings. Research on employer receptivity to hiring disabled workers, as Schroedel and Jacobsen's (1978) recent review indicates, has focused on attitudes toward hiring persons having different disabilities as a function of company size and type of industry. Few if any studies have asked whether attitudes are related to hiring or examined the potential for such practical considerations as the number of positions filled to mediate the impact of attitudes or job development overtures.

The present research addressed four issues. First, are some employers being overwhelmed by job development and reacting adversely? Secondly, is job development associated with hiring of disabled workers and is it more effective with some firms than others? Thirdly, are expressions of willingness to hire disabled workers related to hiring? Fourthly, are company size, the number of positions filled, and type of industry related to hiring and finally, do such factors appear to influence whether job development contacts and attitudes make a difference?

## METHOD

Telephone surveys of employers were conducted in Portland and San Francisco during the spring of 1978.[1] Companies were selected so that half were known to have hired a state vocational rehabilitation agency client during recent months and half to have not on the basis of agency records. This provided an objective measure of whether a firm had hired at least one disabled worker. In Portland, the sampling frame was devised to yield equal numbers of firms in seven industries which had hired substantial numbers of clients between December 1976 and November 1977 and in eight size categories based on the number of employees. The actual sample of 306 companies closely approximated the distribution of firms sought with the exception of a few cases where less than the desired number of firms matched the sampling criteria. Firms which had hired clients were selected randomly within the stratifications from all firms listed in agency records. Equal numbers of firms were selected randomly from companies in the same industries and of the same sizes listed in a directory published by Contacts Influential which purports to cover almost all Portland businesses. In San Francisco,

half the sample of 220 companies consisted of all firms listed in agency files as having hired a client between July 1977 and April 1978. The remaining half consisted of companies selected randomly from a Contacts Influential directory for San Francisco from firms matching the type of industry and size of firms which had hired a client.

The person responsible for hiring at each firm was identified in advance and sent a forewarning letter. The interview conducted approximately one week later inquired about the number of times the company had been contacted over the past year by governmental agencies seeking jobs for disadvantaged and disabled clients, the respondent's reactions to such overtures, and specifically, whether the firm had been contacted by agencies serving disabled persons, including the state vocational rehabilitation agency. The respondent was also asked to state whether the firm had hired one and if one, more than one disabled person during the preceding year, to describe the firm's experience with employing disabled workers, and to estimate the likelihood that a disabled applicant who was more qualified than other nondisabled applicants, as qualified, or less but minimally qualified would be hired. Interviewers followed a script which explained the survey's purpose, noted that participation was voluntary, and set forth the wording of questions. A potential respondent was called at least 4 times before failure to reach them was considered a refusal to participate.

## RESULTS

Eighty-nine percent of the Portland employers and 80 percent of the San Francisco employers were successfully interviewed. Response rates

were lower for firms having 50 or fewer employees than for firms having 51 or more employees in both Portland ($X^2$=4.20, $p<.05$) and in San Francisco ($X^2$=7.06, $p<.01$). Response rates were not related to type of industry or to whether a firm had hired a state agency client.

Exposure and Reactions to Job Development Contacts

Respondents were asked to estimate how many inquiries they had received from various governmental agencies about job openings during the preceding 12 months. In Portland, 59 percent of the respondents recalled being contacted at least once, and the average number of inquiries reported was 9.5. In San Francisco, 44 percent of the respondents recalled being contacted, and the average number of inquiries was 15.6. Reported contacts increased with the number of persons employed by the firm in Portland ($r=.32$, $p<.01$) and in San Francisco ($r=.32$, $p<.01$), suggesting that agencies tended to concentrate their efforts on large companies. The state employment service was named most often as one of the agencies which had contacted the company.

Respondents who had been contacted generally described their reaction as being favorable or indifferent. In Portland, 56 percent said they were favorable or very favorable, 35 percent said they were neither favorable or unfavorable, and only 9 percent said they were unfavorable or very unfavorable. Sixty-nine percent of the San Francisco respondents said they were favorable or very favorable, 26 percent neither favorable or unfavorable, and 5 percent unfavorable or very unfavorable.

When asked whether they found some of the calls objectionable 30 of the Portland respondents and 10 of the San Francisco respondents agreed. Persons having objections were asked to state their nature.[2] In Portland, the most common objections were that the calls consumed too much time and that callers sometimes failed to refer qualified applicants. The most common complaint voiced by San Francisco respondents was lack of courtesy. When asked which aspects of the calls they found helpful, respondents in both cities generally said it was referral of applicants. The most common suggestions offered in response to the question "What recommendations would you make to companies to improve the way in which they deal with companies?" were that agency representatives become familiar with the company and its needs and that they screen referrals more carefully.

Job Development by Agencies Serving Disabled Persons and Hiring of Disabled Workers

The incidence of firms reporting contacts by one or more agencies representing disabled persons increased with the number of employees ($r_P$=.40, $r_{SF}$=.46, $p<.01$). In Portland, firms having more than 50 employees were twice as likely to say that they had been contacted by at least one agency representing disabled persons over the last year than were firms having fewer employees ($X^2$=11.43, $p<.01$) and one and a half times as likely to say that they had been contacted more than once ($X^2$=5.10, $p<.01$). In San Francisco, larger companies were four times as likely to say that they had

been contacted ($X^2$=22.79, p<.01) and twice as likely to say that they had been contacted more than once ($X^2$=11.33, p<.01).

Respondents who reported having been contacted were asked whether as a result they were more inclined to hire a disabled person, less inclined, or as inclined as they had been previously. Twenty-eight percent of the Portland respondents said that they were more inclined, 71 percent as inclined, and only 1 percent less inclined. Twenty-six percent of the San Francisco respondents said that they were more inclined and 74 percent as inclined. None of the San Francisco respondents said they were less inclined. Respondents were further asked whether they felt that they received too many calls from agencies representing disabled persons. Only 8 of 97 Portland respondents and 4 of 71 San Francisco respondents who had been contacted at least once and who answered the question said yes. Replies to these questions suggest that job development by agencies serving disabled persons rarely evokes adverse reactions.

Reports of hiring disabled workers were associated with the number of persons employed by a firm, reports of the number of positions filled during the last year, and whether the respondent recalled being contacted by an agency representing disabled persons. The incidence of respondents reporting that their company had employed or currently employed at least one disabled worker increased with the number of employees ($r_p$=.44; $r_{SF}$=.42, p<.01). Also, respondents with large firms were more likely to indicate that their company had hired at least one disabled worker during the past year than were respondents with small firms ($r_p$=.30; $r_{SF}$=.35, p<.01). Among respondents who reported that their firm had hired one

disabled worker, those with large firms were more likely to state that more than one disabled person had been hired than were those with small firms ($r_p$=.36; $r_{SF}$=.20, p<.01). The frequency of reports that the firm had hired at least one disabled worker increased with the number of positions the respondent said the firm had filled ($r_p$=.29; $r_{SF}$=.20, p<.01).

Respondents who said that their firm had been contacted by an agency representing disabled persons were much more likely to state that their company had hired a disabled person during the last year than were respondents who did not recall being contacted ($X^2_p$=38.05; $X^2_{SF}$=20.68, p<.01). The results in Table 1 show that the percentage of respondents reporting that their firm had hired at least one disabled person and the percentage of respondents reporting that their firm had hired more than one disabled person were correlated with the number of times the respondent recalled being contacted. The relationship between reported contacts and hiring held for firms of different size and was stable across industries. However, as Table 2 reveals, the relationship between contacts and self-reported hiring tended to be strongest for firms which filled a substantial number of positions so that whether a firm responded to a request to hire a disabled worker appears to have been a function of the opportunity to do so.

Job Development by the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and Hiring of Clients

Firms having 51 or more employees were more likely to report that their firm had been contacted by a representative of the state vocational

TABLE 1. Percentage of Respondents who Reported that Their Firm Hired at Least One and More than One Disabled Person During the Past Year among Respondents who Reported Being Contacted Not Once, Once, or More than Once by an Ageny Representing Disabled Persons During the Same Period

| Number of Times the Respondent Reported Being Contacted | Percentage of Respondents Reporting that at Least One Disabled Person Was Hired | Percentage of Respondents Reporting that More than One Disabled Person Was Hired |
|---|---|---|
| Portland | | |
| 0 | 21.0% | 7.4% |
| 1 | 43.6 | 21.8 |
| 2 or more | 77.3 | 65.9 |
| | $X^2 = 50.21$, $p<.01$ | $X^2 = 73.64$, $p<.01$ |
| San Francisco | | |
| 0 | 25.9% | 9.4% |
| 1 | 50.0 | 31.0 |
| 2 or more | 68.4 | 55.3 |
| | $X^2 = 22.98$, $p<.01$ | $X^2 = 34.20$, $p<.01$ |

TABLE 2. Percentage of Firms Which Reported Hiring at Least One Disabled Worker by Number of Positions Filled and Whether the Firm Was Contacted by an Agency Representing Disabled Persons

| | Number of Positions Filled | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Portland | 0 - 9 | 10 or More | |
| Reported being contacted | 39.4% | 70.0% | $X^2 = 8.76$, $p<.01$ |
| Did not report being contacted | 11.1% | 26.4% | $X^2 = 5.94$ $p<.05$ |
| | $X^2 = 12.04$, $p<.01$ | $X^2 = 27.05$, $p<.01$ | |
| San Francisco | | | |
| Reported being contacted | 42.1% | 70.2% | $X^2 = 4.35$ $p<.05$ |
| Did not report being contacted | 18.0% | 38.9% | $X^2 = 1.62$ $p<.05$ |
| | $X^2 = 4.64$ $p<.05$ | $X^2 = 14.33$, $p<.01$ | |

rehabilitation agency than were firms having 50 or fewer employees ($r_p$=.34; $r_{SF}$=.39, p<.01). As with self-reported hiring, firms which hired a client tended to fill more positions than firms which had not hired a client but the relationships were not as pronounced ($r_p$=.16, p<.01; $r_{SF}$=.15, p<.05).

In Portland, firms which were known to have hired a state agency client were more likely to report they had been contacted by a representative of the state agency ($\chi^2$=29.01, p<.01). The San Francisco data displayed a similar trend except in the case of large companies which filled few positions, and the overall relationship failed to reach significance ($\chi^2$=3.50, p<.10). If such firms are excluded, contact by an agency representative was significantly related to hiring a client among the remaining firms ($\chi^2$=7.23, p<.01).

Comparison of the number of employees of firms listed in agency files as having hired clients to all firms in each city appearing in the Contacts Influential directories revealed that a disproportionate percentage of clients were hired by large companies. For example only four percent of all Portland businesses have more than 50 employees, while 34 percent of 574 firms listed in agency files as having hired a client between December 1976 and November 1977 had more than 50 employees. In San Francisco, slightly over three percent of all businesses have more than 50 employees, while 40 percent of the 177 firms which hired a client between July 1977 and April 1978 had more than 50 employees.

Whether these figures reflect greater readiness on the part of large firms to hire clients depends on how many positions small and large

companies filled. In Portland, data on the number of clients hired by firms permitted making the appropriate comparison. If the number of positions filled by the Portland firms surveyed are extrapolated to the general population of businesses on the basis of company size, firms having 51 or more employees should have accounted for 37.3% of all positions filled. Yet 46.8% of all client hires were attributable to firms having 51 or more employees. Thus, large companies seem to have hired not only a high percentage of clients but a greater percentage of state agency clients than would be expected from the number of positions they filled.

In Portland, it was also possible to compare the sizes of firms hiring severely disabled clients to the sizes of all companies in the city. As was the case with client hires generally, large firms were more likely to have hired a severely disabled client than would be expected from the percentage of such firms in the total population of Portland businesses. While only four percent of all Portland firms have 51 or more employees, 43 percent of the firms listed in state agency files as having hired a severely disabled client over the past year had 51 or more employees. Of firms which hired clients, a higher percentage of firms having more than 50 employees had hired at least one severely disabled client than had smaller firms (67% versus 47%, $X^2=21.36$, $p<.01$), and more interestingly, severely disabled clients represented a higher proportion of all clients hired by firms with more than 50 employees than among smaller firms (58% versus 45%; $X^2=12.12$, $p<.01$). Large companies not only hired a disproportionate number of severely

disabled clients, but hired a higher percentage of severely disabled clients than did small companies.

The distributions of firms which hired clients also differed from the distributions of all firms in the cities with respect to type of industry. The departures, however, tended to be unique to locale. For example, significantly fewer firms in finance were listed in agency files in Portland than would be expected from the percentage of financial firms in the Portland business community ($p<.01$ by z), but in San Francisco, which is known for its concentration of major financial institutions, just the opposite was the case ($p<.01$ by z). The only consistencies were that companies in educational services and social services occurred significantly more often in agency files than would be expected from the percentage f such firms represented among all employers in the cities ($p<.01$ by z).

Attitudes Toward Hiring Disabled Workers

Sixty-two percent of the Portland employers and 65 percent of the San Francisco employers said they currently employed or had employed disabled workers. Ratings of the performance of disabled employees were generally favorable. In Portland, 89 percent of the respondents rated the performance of the company's disabled employees as being average or above average in comparison to the company's nondisabled employees. In San Francisco, 98 percent of the respondents rated the performance of their disabled employees as average or above average. Respondents who recalled receiving referrals from the state vocational rehabilitation agency tended to see clients as

being competitive. Seventy-seven percent of the Portland respondents and 88 percent of the San Francisco respondents said that clients were usually as qualified or more qualified than other applicants.

Table 3 summarizes answers to three questions which asked the respondent to agree or disagree that the company would hire a disabled applicant who was more qualified than other applicants, as qualified as other applicants, or minimally qualified, but less qualified than other applicants. The results are very similar for the two cities and suggest that receptivity to hiring disabled workers is tempered by a desire to recruit the most qualified labor available. While most firms would hire a disabled applicant who was more qualified and approximately one-third would give preference to an equally qualified disabled applicant, very few would hire a disabled applicant who was only minimally qualified. Many respondents equivocated and their answers are tallied as "other" in the table. The most common comments were that the hiring decision would depend on the job at issue, the applicant's disability, or both. Responses to the three questions were not related to self-reported hiring or to whether the firm had hired a state agency client.

Responses to other survey items which might be considered to reflect attitudes yielded inconsistent results. For example, the Portland respondents who said they were more inclined to hire a disabled person as a result of being contacted were more likely to report that their firm had

TABLE 3. Responses to Three Questions Concerning Receptivity to Hiring Disabled Workers

| | Portland | San Francisco |
|---|---|---|
| If the disabled applicant was more qualified than other applicants, he or she would be hired in preference to the others. | | |
| Agree | 82.9% | 88.6% |
| Disagree | 4.1 | 2.3 |
| Other | 13.0 | 9.1 |
| If two applicants had roughly the same qualifications, we would hire a disabled worker in preference to a nondisabled worker. | | |
| Agree | 30.1% | 32.4% |
| Disagree | 18.2 | 16.5 |
| Other | 51.7 | 51.1 |
| We would hire a minimally qualified disabled applicant in preference to a more qualified nondisabled applicant. | | |
| Agree | 3.0% | 5.7% |
| Disagree | 78.1 | 79.0 |
| Other | 18.9 | 15.3 |

hired a disabled worker during the last year than respondents who said their inclination was unchanged or lower ($X^2$=7.73, p<.01), but the relationship did not hold for San Francisco respondents. Also, Portland respondents who said working conditions at their firm made it difficult to hire disabled persons were less likely to report hiring a disabled person during the last year than were respondents who said otherwise ($X^2$=15.09, p<.01) but again the relationship was not significant in San Francisco.

## DISCUSSION

Being contacted by agencies serving disabled and disadvantaged persons does not appear to trouble employers. Most survey respondents described themselves as favorable or indifferent to being contacted and relatively few had objections. The only recurrent concern was that agency representatives do their job properly by becoming familiar with the company and screening referrals accordingly. Responses to a series of attitude questions underscored the importance of competitive skills. Firms seemed prepared to hire disabled workers but only to the extent that they were as qualified as other applicants.

Job development was associated with hiring disabled persons. Respondents who recalled being contacted were more likely to report that their firm had hired a disabled person, and the percentage of respondents reporting that their firm had hired one and more than one disabled person increased with the number of times the respondent recalled being contacted. The possibility that approaching employers put them on notice that an

applicant was disabled and thereby only influenced their ability to recall hiring disabled workers rather than actual hiring is contradicted by the finding in Portland that firms which were known to have hired a state vocational rehabilitation agency client were more likely to report that they had been contacted by the agency than were respondents with firms which had not hired a client. In this case, the relation between reported contacts and hiring cannot be attributed to recall because hiring was objectively verified. The association between reported contacts and hiring was most pronounced when firms also reported filling a substantial number of positions, so that complying with a request to hire a disabled person seems to have depended on the ability to do so.

Agencies appear to appreciate the better opportunities large companies offer to disabled workers. Firms with more than 50 employees were more likely to report being contacted than were firms with fewer employees, and the larger firms were also more likely to report hiring disabled workers. Whether the pattern reflects more intense job development activity, more enlightened policy in large companies, greater latitude to make accommodations, or greater sensitivity to affirmative action requirements, clients and counselors would be well advised to apply at large companies whenever possible. Comparisons in Portland indicated that large companies were considerably more receptive to hiring severely disabled clients than were small companies. Strong association between the number of positions a firm reported filling and reported hiring of disabled workers suggests that hiring of disabled persons is in part simply a matter of opportunity and

that keeping abreast of demand is important to assisting clients to find jobs. Agencies might consider conducting similar surveys periodically to keep staff informed of shifts in demand, to identify industries in need of job development, and to check the effectiveness of placement programs. The level of investment would be modest for most medium to large agencies and would be justified by the return.

The surveys failed to yield consistent relationships between the respondents' statements about the firms receptivity to hiring disabled workers and hiring patterns. While the results cannot be considered as persuasive evidence that attitudes are not related to hiring, they do suggest that future studies of employer attitudes should check whether expressions of receptivity are associated with a company's track record. For the items examined, reports of hiring and actual hiring of state agency clients were more closely associated with the number of persons employed by a company or the number of positions filled than with attitudes.

The results suggest that job development is indeed beneficial. Whether contacting employers in behalf of clients is more or less effective than clients applying on their own remains to be answered. Counselors interested in developing better working relations with local employers have reason to be encouraged. If they do their homework they can expect a good reception. More importantly, they have reason to believe that contacting employers will substantially improve the likelihood that their clients will get jobs.

## FOOTNOTES

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[2] Random subsamples of 60 replies to each open-ended question or when there were fewer than 60 replies, all replies were independently coded by two raters for both surveys. Reliability by kappa for the items reported was .95 or greater in all cases ($p<.01$).

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